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1989

### Interview with Mary Drew

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*Fort Hays State University*

Mary Evelyn Drew

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## CHAPTER II

## Oral History Interview

TOD: Good Afternoon! We are here this afternoon to talk with Mary Evelyn Drew from Syracuse, Kansas, about her experiences teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. Good afternoon, Evelyn.

EVELYN: Hello.

TOD: Describe the typical day before and after school.

EVELYN: Well, before school, you had to gather in the wood. To get ready, get your fire built. And, let's see . . . oh, put the meal on the stove, so it would be sure and be hot by noon for the kids. We usually had soup or goulash or something for lunch.

TOD: How about after school?

EVELYN: After school, you had to be your own janitor. You had to clean up the place and be ready for the next day.

TOD: How are teaching ways or habits different now than when you were teaching?

EVELYN: In the one-room school, you had to teach all subjects. Then you had to divide your days into different subject matter so that you

could get to it all in a week. Now, you just teach it one day at a time.

TOD: How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?

EVELYN: Very lady-like. You had to wear hose. You had to wear a dress. You didn't go dancing, and your life after school was not your own either.

TOD: Were you in charge of any extracurricular activities?

EVELYN: All extracurricular activities. I had recess duties. I had to take care of the first graders clear on up to the eighth graders. A lot of the eighth grade boys were seventeen and eighteen years old. You were expected to have a program at least once a month to entertain the whole community.

TOD: Were there any sports . . . I mean . . . like basketball or anything like that?

EVELYN: No, we played softball and kickball, but nothing . . . ah . . . no competition with other schools at all.

TOD: Was there a problem with teacher turnover?

EVELYN: No, not really.

TOD: None back then. Did more than one teacher work in a school?

EVELYN: No, you were the only teacher.

TOD: Was there a principal for the school?

EVELYN: No.

TOD: How did kids act in school?

EVELYN: Most of the time, they were good. This eighth grade boy that I had was real big, and I got on the good side of him to start off with. For some reason, I don't know why, but anyway, he liked me. From then on, if I had wanted anything done, he would do it for me. If I wanted him to rule over the playground while I graded papers, he would take charge. The rest of the kids knew that he was the boss. They would do like he wanted done. He never did . . . you know . . . he wasn't mean or anything with his ruling. He just kind of refereed the ball games and things the kids were doing. He was really a good kid. I had heard all sorts of things, but he turned out to be a real good kid.

TOD: Were there any fights to speak of?

EVELYN: The only fight I can remember was with him and his two brothers. They fought like cats

and dogs. But to get along with the other families that came to school--we had five families--they just all played and got along really well. The younger ones had their corner of the playground that they liked to dig in the dirt and play like that. About fourth grade on up, they would play ball or "kick the can" or "fox and geese," whatever season it was. If there was snow on the ground, we would play "fox and geese" all the time.

TOD: Did the kids get into big enough trouble to be suspended from school?

EVELYN: No, we didn't ever suspend anybody from school. They might get punished and get all of their activity periods taken away from them, like going outside and playing. They had to stay in and study or something. But I never did expel anybody or anything like that.

TOD: How were discipline problems with children handled?

EVELYN: I have to think this one through. Really, you didn't have discipline problems like you have today because the older children took

care of the younger children, and the younger children were just kind of guided by the teacher. But there really wasn't a lot of, what you'd call, discipline problems.

TOD: Were parents involved in the discipline?

EVELYN: No, you disciplined as you thought best, and the parents always backed you up. I didn't have any trouble with parents at all.

TOD: Did you ever swat kids back then?

EVELYN: Yes.

TOD: Did you?

EVELYN: Ya, and you were allowed to without any reprimand from anyone.

TOD: Did female teachers handle discipline differently than the male teachers?

EVELYN: I really don't know. I didn't know any male teachers for rural schools at that time. We were all female.

TOD: All female?

EVELYN: Yes, in this county. That is where I taught, you see, Hamilton County.

TOD: Where did you live while you were teaching school?

EVELYN: I lived in Syracuse and drove back and forth.

TOD: How far? Where was the school?

EVELYN: Seven miles south of Syracuse. Excuse me, seven south and about two west.

TOD: The school is not there anymore, is it?

EVELYN: The schoolhouse is not there. The trees are there, but that is all. It is out there by Steve Grusing's place. I don't know whether you know where Steve Grusing lives or not.

TOD: Where is that from the schoolhouse that is still out there now?

EVELYN: No, there are no schoolhouses out there at all.

TOD: Oh, they're all gone?

EVELYN: Yes, they're all gone.

TOD: There is a community building out there. I didn't know if that was still a one-room schoolhouse.

EVELYN: Ok, the community building is east. You went straight south seven miles to the gas station and turned west and went approximately two and one half miles.

TOD: How much schooling did you have in order to teach?

EVELYN: At that time, you had to have what they called an emergency certificate, which required forty-eight, ah no, thirty hours. I

better look that up here. Let's see, I just had to have an elementary provisional certificate, is all I had to have. In order to get that, it was thirty hours.

TOD: What subjects were studied?

EVELYN: All subjects were taught. English, arithmetic, reading, writing, geography, history, government. I can't think of anymore. Surely, we had some others. Spelling.

TOD: What was the length of the school day and school year?

EVELYN: Eight months and eight hours a day.

TOD: What teaching methods were used?

EVELYN: Well, not any different from what they use today. Actually, we just, ah, we had study periods and work periods. They're not much different than they are today.

TOD: Describe the typical school day curriculum.

EVELYN: We had reading the first thing in the morning, while the children were fresh and could think, and then geography and history were taught on alternate days with health and science. Then in the afternoon, right after lunch, we had math and spelling, and then we



took the last forty-five minutes of each day as what we called a study period, and then they prepared their classes for the next day.

TOD: What were the amount of different classes given at one time?

EVELYN: Well, like the first graders would be having their reading lesson over in one area of the building--ah--first and second in one area, and the third and fourth and fifth were in another area, and the sixth, seventh and eighth were in a different area.

TOD: Were competency tests taken for promotional purposes, like grade level tests?

EVELYN: No, the only type of test we had was for eighth graders to pass, and they were called county exams so that they could go to high school.

TOD: What was the name of the school?

EVELYN: Rising Star.

TOD: Did Rising Star have a library?

EVELYN: Yes, right in the building, it had a library. In fact, it had a good library. The teacher before me had a good . . . a lot of books and reference books of all kinds.

TOD: How did you decide on a textbook?

EVELYN: They were already there, and each year the county, I mean, every five years, the county changed our books. We were asked our opinion on different books, but the county really handled it--the county superintendent.

TOD: What was the atmosphere of the educational program? Was it strict, loose or . . . ?

EVELYN: I guess you would kind of call it loose. It was guided by the teacher and the county and things, but if we, if the teacher had some good ideas, we could present them; they were accepted.

TOD: What were some of the rules of the school that may be different from today?

EVELYN: I am not real sure. Now, do you mean for the teacher or the students?

TOD: Just any rules, like gum chewing.

EVELYN: Well, the teacher was the complete authority. It was never argued. You didn't argue with your teacher on authority. If I said, "Spit the gum out," they didn't argue or discuss it at all, the gum was spit out. It was kind of nice because you didn't get any back talk at all from the students.

TOD: What were some of the special observances of your school, like Christmas programs or music contests?

EVELYN: We always had a Christmas program. Even the year that I only had three students, we had a Christmas program. I went to the community, and one of the ladies--her name is Becky Gulner now--was my pianist, and her little boy, preschooler, took part in the program. A neighbor man was always Santa Claus. We always had a Christmas program and the "last day of school" program.

TOD: Did Rising Star have a graduation exercise?

EVELYN: No. The first year I taught, I had an eighth grader, two eighth graders. You just took the test. The county superintendent said you could go to high school then and that was all.

TOD: Now, was this one-room schoolhouse just up to eighth grade?

EVELYN: Yes, first through eighth.

TOD: What was the usual age a child began school?

EVELYN: They had to be five before January in order to start school.

TOD: Did many children move in and out of the school during the year?

EVELYN: The first year I taught there, yes. They migrated quite a bit. The second year, I just had one family and their three kids. That was it. The first year, I had a family of five that did not stay the full year.

TOD: What was the greatest distance traveled by any student, and what was the mode of transportation?

EVELYN: Parents brought their children to the school. We didn't have a school bus. They just brought them to school, or if they had an eighth grade boy--or an eighth grade child, I should say--they drove the family to school. I would say four miles is the farthest any of them had to go to commute.

TOD: How far did you have to go to school?

EVELYN: About nine miles, ten miles.

TOD: How did these parents get these kids to school? Was it by automobile?

EVELYN: The family automobile.

TOD: How many students went to school?

EVELYN: The first year had thirteen and the next year had three.

TOD: What type of occupations did the students usually take up?

EVELYN: You mean after they graduated?

TOD: Yes.

EVELYN: The two that I had that graduated, one of them went on to be a schoolteacher. The other one went to college and graduated, but then she got married and raised a family. I really don't know what her vocation is right now. Gary is still a schoolteacher in Goodland.

TOD: Did many of them go on to college?

EVELYN: Yes, I was in contact with this family of five I was telling you about, and two of their children went on to college. The others might have as they grew up, but I know two of them did.

TOD: What was the average number of years a student spent in school?

EVELYN: In this particular school, with my four years of knowledge of the school, they went ahead and went all eight years.

TOD: Were the students required to go eight?

EVELYN: Until they were sixteen, and then they were free to do whatever they wanted to do.

TOD: Are there any outstanding students from the school?

EVELYN: I would call Gary an outstanding student because he has been teaching now since about '61. He has done pretty good.

TOD: What was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

EVELYN: We didn't have a dress code, as such, but everybody was very clean and wore good clothes. They didn't wear raggedy clothes or anything like that.

TOD: They could afford good clothes?

EVELYN: Yes, all the families were farmers, and the children could wear good clothes.

TOD: What was the cost of education to the student and his family?

EVELYN: I really don't know because they were required to buy all of their books, their paper, their pencils; they had to buy everything. The district didn't furnish anything. I really don't know how much of a cost it would have been, but they were required to buy everything.

TOD: Was the land purchased or given to the school?

EVELYN: I don't know because they had school several years before I taught, so I don't really know.

TOD: What was your salary when you first started teaching?

EVELYN: Two hundred a month, I think. No, two hundred and fifty a month. Two hundred and fifty a month for eight months. And that is all you got. You just got the eight months and nothing else.

TOD: What was your salary your last year of teaching?

EVELYN: Oh, pretty close to a thousand a month.

TOD: How was your salary determined in a one-room schoolhouse?

EVELYN: You just had to sign a contract with the school board, and they told you how much they thought they could pay, and you accepted it, or you didn't get the job.

TOD: So there was a school board then?

EVELYN: Oh yes, I had three members on my school board, and I had a county superintendent that I had to report to.

TOD: Did a teacher have a voice in salary decisions?

EVELYN: You didn't have a negotiation at all. Like I said, if they told you that two hundred and fifty dollars was all they could pay, and if you wanted to teach, you took it.

TOD: How did you get your pay check?

EVELYN: They had a treasurer of the school board, and they paid me each month. They usually brought it to the schoolhouse.

TOD: When was the schoolhouse built?

EVELYN: Let's see, I taught in '51 to '53. I imagine it was built in the thirties or before the thirties.

TOD: Do you have any idea by whom?

EVELYN: No, I really don't.

TOD: Do you have any idea why it was built?

EVELYN: When it was first built, there was quite a community out there, and they needed a school closer to their community.

TOD: What materials were used to build the schoolhouse? Was it brick?

EVELYN: Wood. They had a cement basement, and then they built a wooden house on top of the basement.

TOD: Was Rising Star a public school?

EVELYN: Yes.



TOD: What type of heating, lighting and toilets were available?

EVELYN: We had electricity, and we had coal or wooden stove, whichever you wanted to burn in it. We had outhouses, just like Little House on the Prairie.

TOD: How did the school get its water?

EVELYN: The school had its own well, and it had a windmill on it so that you didn't have to pump it. The wind done that for you.

TOD: What is the significance of the school name?

EVELYN: I have no idea. It was built a long time before I started teaching there.

TOD: Describe the interior of the school.

EVELYN: It was strictly a one-room schoolhouse with a little alcove for our coats. After I started teaching, I had bookshelves built around along the walls for our reference books. We had a great big chalkboard on one end of the building for everybody to work at. We had a great big potbelly stove for coal/wood burning. The desks sat around for the kids.

TOD: You were in charge of all the upkeep on the building?

EVELYN: Yes.

TOD: What physical changes occurred to the schoolhouse during the years you taught there?

EVELYN: The bookshelves was the main thing because there was no storage space or anything. Like I said, the alcove for coats and hats was the only thing we had, and then they built that, and they redone a desk for me so that I would have a teacher's desk. The treasurer of the school and I redone the desk. That is the only thing that they did do to it.

TOD: What were some of the physical problems of the building?

EVELYN: Well, we should have had the windows fixed. The dirt came in pretty good and the cold air, but there was never anything done to them. They knew they were going to have to close it, and they didn't see any sense in fixing it up.

TOD: What happened to the schoolhouse?

EVELYN: A man bought it and moved it to his land, and he lives in it now.

TOD: Where is it?

EVELYN: Southeast of Kendall, or southwest--I have forgotten. A man by the name of Schultz

bought it and moved it over. However, he doesn't live in it. He sold it then, and some other family lives in it now.

TOD: What happened to the equipment and supplies after the school was closed?

EVELYN: They were either auctioned off or Syracuse School District took it.

TOD: Why did they close the schoolhouse?

EVELYN: Enrollment. Even this family that I had just the three students, they moved themselves-- so, it was just lack of students.

TOD: What were the boundaries of the school's jurisdiction?

EVELYN: You mean, how big an area was it? I would say it is about as big as Syracuse's playground. We had a barn for the horses and a shed and the two outside toilets.

TOD: Was there several schoolhouses out there in that area?

EVELYN: No, we were the only ones, except what they called the "meno community." They were quite a ways from us.

TOD: Who decided who went to what school?

EVELYN: You went by district, just like you do now. What do you call it?--if you lived in that

district, you went there. There was no way that you went anywhere else.

TOD: Was the schoolhouse used for any social activities as well as for education?

EVELYN: Yes.

TOD: What were some of those?

EVELYN: They had what they called the "Grange Organizations" for farmers, and they always met there once a month. The ladies had a book club or a reading club that met there also. But the Grange was the big thing. They met . . . it is kind of like our co-op now. The co-op for the farmers . . . only they called it the Grange Organization.

TOD: Who hired and fired the teachers?

EVELYN: The school board.

TOD: Are all the school board members still alive?

EVELYN: Yes, Grinstead in town, his dad was one. Do you happen to know Mrs. Gregory? She's an elderly lady who lives down here. Now, Mr. Morgan lives in Salina or Great Bend. Viol Wissenhunt is still alive, and she was our county superintendent. She is in the rest home here in Syracuse.

TOD: Did any activities take place between schools?

EVELYN: No.

TOD: The softball that you played, ever . . . ?

EVELYN: We were too far away. The closest one was fifteen or twenty miles. There was no transportation whatsoever.

TOD: Are there any controversies surrounding the Rising Star School, like between the community?

EVELYN: No, there wasn't. It was a real good community to work, and everybody worked together. If I suggested something, and the community thought it was fine, they all jumped in and helped and done it. It was a real workable group.

Do you know Valera Davis? She is a retired schoolteacher here. She was my first county superintendent. I taught five years at Kendall before I went to the rural school.

TOD: What teaching aids were made available? Did you have any teaching aids?

EVELYN: Not really, as what you would call teaching aids. You just had to kind of make up your own. Like the teachers have colored sticks

now to teach their first graders how to count, well, we used chalk and erasers and the students. We didn't have any real equipment to do those things with.

TOD: Were there any special classes or unique educational services offered, like special ed?

EVELYN: No.

TOD: How did you get your certificate?

EVELYN: I started teaching on my high school education the first year, and then I had to get eight hours the following summer. I got a provisional certificate then good for eight months.

TOD: Did the students that came to the school, were they from different backgrounds?

EVELYN: No, they were all farmers. Their parents were farmers. It was a farming community.

TOD: Where did you teach before the Rising Star School?

EVELYN: I taught at Kendall, JT 9 District, for five years.

TOD: And then you spent two years at the Rising Star School?

EVELYN: Yes, and thirty-three years in Syracuse.

TOD: What year did you retire from Syracuse?

EVELYN: 1987. I started in 1946 and ended in '87.

TOD: Did you receive any awards while you were teaching at Rising Star?

EVELYN: No, I didn't.

TOD: I didn't know if there were any state awards.

EVELYN: I don't really think they had any state awards then at that time. I don't recall them mentioning anything.

TOD: Thank you for your time and cooperation.  
This concludes the oral history interview of Mary Evelyn Drew.